



PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD | The Adam Fink Story

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THE PAPER SHREDDER

I HUNG up the phone with Adam Fink of Parable of the Vineyard and went straight for the writer's desk, feverishly unloading the congestion of sentences onto the electronic page before they floated off into the *forever* oblivion. It was the same with Justin Best of Christian Truthers on the following evening. I crossed the room from the phone to the coffee pot, advising my wife that it would be another long night and that she should go to bed without me.

The eureka moment is that I had one narrative to tell but from two completely separate people, each inhabiting different pockets of North America. Adam was from Missouri and Justin from Florida. Their common denominator derived from the fact

that they were friends and YouTube ministry partners advocating the Torah, just as Rob Skiba was—though not for long. My push to get this article out was a race against the ordinances of time and in the dawning hours of 2020 I didn't make the cut-off. People were falling over dead in Wuhan, China whereas here in America, Kobe Bryant exited the world stage *via* a helicopter crash. But then unbeknownst to myself or Adam and probably anyone else in the online community, Justin was already fermenting the *inner* thoughts which would, within the days and weeks to come, lead to the annulling of their partnership.

But that is not the whole of it. You had to have been there to see the shock and awe at play. Justin Best walked completely away from the faith as well as the Bible which he had claimed to defend, leading a great many people with him into the labyrinth of agnosticism. Such a shame.

This is not *that* story. Perhaps it will be told at another hour, and I believe it will. Just not today. In the very least I think you should know why I have spent the last three years holding this article over the paper shredder. Everything unraveled.

Witnesses to the wake of the wreckage will perhaps understand why the original written story, a tag team effort between both ministry partners, will remain on my shelf, collecting dust. *For now*. Some will go so far as to advise that there will never be such a moment when Justin's rise to the ministry should be highlighted, given the apostasy. I disagree. A shooting star blazes in the firmament but for a moment, lighting up the night sky. It was like that for those of us who happened to look up for Best's arrival. He came and he went, blink and you missed it. I was there for the momentous occasion in His-Story, perhaps you were there as well. But far more importantly, so was Adam Fink. Every life is a story, and in that story, there are sentences making up paragraphs, which in turn form chapters, all of which are littered with footnotes. Chalk Best's involvement up to one of them then—a note at the bottom of a page. Justin's life story may be removed from this article (it has slimmed considerably at the waistline), but the ending remains intact.

Adam and I go way back, in fact to the very beginning of his POTV YouTube channel. I have likely known him longer than anyone in the online community, though I may not be the only contender for the claim. That is to say, despite having our rough spots in the intervening years, we remain good friends. Indeed, Justin and I were also friends if only for a spiel. *Blink and you'll miss it*. His falling from the faith was terrible to behold but I will not sacrifice the memory of our good moments because of it.

Speaking of which.

My Facebook account resembles a ghost town these days. It just so happened that I returned there over the weekend, mostly to inspect the decaying infrastructure and listen to the whistling wind, when I stubbed my toe upon an unforeseen relic. An unread note from Justin Best. In fact, it was his final message to me on the Social Network in the weeks or even the days before his tragic turn, and here is what it said:

I'm praying for you.

For the remainder of this exercise, that is how I will *choose* to remember the former ministry leader

of Christian Truthers. By his own confession, he prayed for the strengthening of my faith in confusing times. Indeed, there are many people within the community who are returning the favor and praying for the renewed salvation of JB. Perhaps, if the will of heaven should shine favorably upon him once again, I will get around to publishing his faith journey, as per our interview. Because even footnotes have stories to tell, you know.

NORTH & SOUTH OF BEVERLY HILLS

ADAM Fink was born in the right place and the right time. It was the Eighties, and shopping malls were all the rage. You had to have been there. Though it probably helped that his family made a killing off of them, more on that in a moment. His mother was a farm girl from southern Indiana, one of seven siblings raised on a seven-hundred-acre ranch, consisting of hundreds of cattle. His father was Israeli born. The Fink's had reportedly been living in the land of Palestine for several generations, well into the 18th-century, and even claimed their lineage from the tribe of Benjamin. In 1979, after a two-year stint in the Israeli Army, his father and grandparents migrated to America in order to try their fortune in the clothing business. His 18-year-old mother left everything she knew in Indiana too, including Catholicism. They met in southern California. Soon thereafter, she became a Jew, and Fink an only child.

His family had already struck their fortune when he was born on February 16, 1982, according to the Gregorian. "My family was actually pretty wealthy," Fink spoke into my end of the recording. "I grew up pretty wealthy."

Fink laughed.

"If you remember the jumpsuits in the eighties; the women's fashion, the jumpsuits with rhinestones; my grandmother actually was the one that brought that to the states."

By the time the Fink's had settled down in the San Fernando Valley, a lush 260-square-mile region located just north of the Los Angeles Basin, the pastoral landscape of Crosby's World War Two hit had been radically transformed from a stereotyped stronghold for singing cowboys and Los Angelino cattle ranchers to one of shopping malls and teenagers. Between 1945 and 1980, the population

more than quintupled, a large chunk of which contained the upper-middle class. Even still, the sprawling suburbs just north of Beverly Hills and Bel Air were largely snubbed by Hollywood.

It would take *Valley Girl*, Frank Zappa's surprise radio hit of 1982 (the year in which Fink was born), to awaken American youth to the newfound cultural temple, The Shopping Mall.

Certainly, Fink's own peripheral vision did little to dissuade him from that fact. The Northridge Fashion Center, Sherman Oaks Fashion Square, The Promenade in Woodland Hills, Topanga Plaza and the Glendale and Sherman Oaks gallerias, just to name a few, not only elevated the horizon, but seemed to populate their chrome railways with Madonna look-alikes. Not forgetting the rhinestone which his own family had introduced.

With Hollywood's eventual tip of the hat, films such as 'Fast Times at Ridgemont High' and 'The Karate Kid' gloried in a seemingly untapped well of girls, jocks, and prowling hormones, thereby embodying America's vision of the high school, the dojo, and *wait for it*, the shopping mall. Soon thereafter, 'Earth Girls Are Easy', 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer', 'Encino Man', and 'Clueless' followed suit, inviting teenagers everywhere into the phenomena that Fink had inherited by birth.

Though Fink and I grew up only twenty miles removed, as the bird flies, with the I-405 seemingly making my childhood upbringing in Hawthorne a hop and a skip away from his (if traffic weren't a thing), the Santa Monica Mountains divided us almost as surely as the Berlin Wall in east and west Berlin. We also had Santa Monica and Westwood to contend with, which made our worlds entirely separate universes. The reality in which his world exemplified however quickly arrived at my own, and I remember it well. The Galleria at South Bay in Redondo Beach, a three-story, fully enclosed multi-plex, first opened in 1985; the very ground where, on November 1, 1960, democratic nominee John F. Kennedy gave a speech on the last stop of his campaign tour. He won the general election 8 days later. Upon its opening, each retailer custom designed their own store, and in 1985, even the multi-layered parking structure was breathtaking. Nordstrom alone was three stories. On its highest level, where my parents usually entered *via* an adjacent walkway, televisions would proudly display the latest MTV hits, while a classical pianist might be simultaneously heard far below on the ground floor. In its dawning hours, the Galleria

wasn't simply a one-stop destination for fashion, toys, or electronics. It included an A-1 photo service, hair stylist, optometrist, shoe repair, surf shop, even a dry-cleaners—not to mention the food court. Like Fink, a hop and a skip away in the Valley, the shopping mall became my weekly escape from the otherwise bland world of the paved parking lot existence.

After graduating from seminary in 1980, the year I was born, my father moved from Lakewood, California, America's first fully designed suburb, twenty miles west to Hawthorne, in order to take the position of senior pastor at Centinela Bible Church, a meager congregation estimating perhaps a hundred weekly attendees. The position included residence in a parsonage, which is to say, my upbringing was that of the King James Bible. Fink on the other hand was educated in Hebrew.

Rabbinic Judaism has been the mainstream face of Judaism since the destruction of the Temple in 70AD when the Pharisees replaced the Sanhedrin as both the legal and religious authority of their dispersion. And in fact, there is no Judaism without the Parashiyim. With their rise to power came the Babylonian Talmud in written form, which evolved we are told out of an understanding that Moshe received from Elohiym on Sinai the Written Torah as well as, in addition to Torah, the Oral Torah. "I was the spawn of a Jew and a Catholic. But I grew up Jewish, and I went to a Jewish private school." His school, Abraham Joshua Heschel Day School, was in Northridge, a brisk walk from Reseda. "Unfortunately, it was rabbinical traditional Judaism. Total Mishnah midrash, Talmud—all that garbage."

Still, Fink insists, it was a good school with good teachers. Admission cost somewhere in the ballpark of eight grand, "and that was in the eighties. I remember my parents talking about that. I couldn't fathom eight-thousand dollars back then. Who knows what it costs now." An imaginably elaborate field trip for any elementary-aged child might have included a day at the Los Angeles Zoo or Marineland of the Pacific, a public oceanarium on the Palos Verdes peninsula which finally closed its doors on February 11, 1987. But not so for Abraham Joshua Heschel. Fink's first grade year involved a steady build-up of pen-pal letters, passed to and fro between them and an Indian reservation in New Mexico, which ultimately culminated with a plane ride out to meet